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CHURCH DEFENCE

BY A

DISSENTING MINISTER.



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A DISSENTING MINISTER.

Two Lectures,

BY THE

REV. ROBERT CHRISTISON,

Late Dissenting Minister at Orrell, near Wigan, Lancashire.



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A Plea for Church Defence.

LECTURE I.

DELIVERED IN THE CORN EXCHANGE, PRESTON, AND IN VARIOUS
OTHER TOWNS.

*“What have the Dissenters to offer in room of
the Church which they seek to destroy?—
A Plea for Church Defence.”*



I SUPPOSE it is not a very usual thing to find a Dissenting minister on a Church of England platform, and that, too, for the purpose of lecturing in defence of the Church. Allow me, therefore, at the outset, to offer a word or two by way of explanation.

In the first place, then, as perhaps my manner of speech may have already told you, I am not an Englishman at all, neither am I an Irishman. But though neither an Englishman nor an Irishman, I happen to be a Briton, and a lover of

British institutions. I am a plain Scotchman, from among the hills on the other side of the Tweed. But though not a born and bred Englishman, I love England. I came to it in quest of health, and it gave it me. It has been the land of my adoption for the last ten years, so that I must now have some interest in it, and am not altogether a stranger to, nor am I indifferent, to what is going on in its ecclesiastical affairs.

In the second place, although through a sort of concurrence of circumstances I came to be associated with the Dissenters, yet I cannot say that I have been a very hard and fast one, at least after the modern English type of them, and the less so as I became better acquainted with their principles, and also their practices. English Dissent turns out to be a very different thing from what in my ignorance and simplicity I was led to suppose it was. The Dissenterism of the Baxters, and Owens, and Henrys, and Howes of other days I could sympathize with, but the Dissenterism of Mr. Miall and his followers I do not and never could agree with.

Moreover, I have of late been more carefully *examining* the whole of this subject. I have

had my eyes open to the working of Dissent around me for the last ten years, and have learned a good deal of what it is elsewhere in this country; and while I freely grant that Dissenters do, and have done much good in their way, and that there are a great many excellent people among them,—people for which our country and our Christianity have cause to be proud,—people from whom I myself have experienced personal kindness, and whom I will regard with more than feelings of respect as long as I live,—yet I have arrived at the conviction—the honest conviction—that the principles on which their system is founded, are erroneous, and that the policy which so many of them are at present pursuing towards the Established Church is altogether wrong,—that it is unwise and rash, unfair and unjust, unprovoked and uncalled for, and that were it carried out, would ere long bring about a religious state of things in this country, so sad, that I believe many of the wisest and the best people among themselves, would be the first to deplore.

With these convictions I feel it a duty to oppose them in their attack upon the National Church, and this all the more that the system

which they have to offer as a substitute for an Endowed Established Church is so faulty and defective, as I will in this lecture endeavour to show.

In the third place, if in what follows I may seem a little severe on Dissent, my only apology can be this,—that were I to tell you one-half the suffering that I and my family have quietly endured for years under that system, and this simply and solely because I have honourably stood my ground against the tyranny of a few imperious leading Dissenters, who attempted to trample my rights in the dust, and outraged their own professed principles,—were I to tell you this, your only surprise would be how I could possibly deal so leniently with a system under which I had endured so much. But enough of these personal allusions; they are not agreeable, and I shall not trouble you with them further, but now proceed with my lecture, which is entitled,—

“A Plea for Church Defence; or, what have the Dissenters to offer in room of the Church which they seek to destroy?”

It is in vain, then, for Churchmen any longer

to shut their eyes to the fact, that there is a deep and wide-spread hostility to the Church, both as a Church, and especially as an Established Church, existing in this land. And here, at the outset, it may not be amiss to take a glance at the various parties of which the Church's foes are composed.

First, there is a large class of persons who know nothing, or next to nothing, and care as little, about religion at all, but who have an average intelligence about other things. They seldom, or never, darken the door of any place of worship. Religion to them is a thing of no account whatever. But these people, while they may look with no favour on the Dissenting chapel, look with a jealous eye upon the Church. They have a sort of idea, however erroneous, that the Church is somehow eating up a good deal of the fat of the land, which, as they think, might go for another and better purpose. Now these people, while not the first to move in the matter, will be ready enough to follow and join in the cry, "Down with the Church," and apply her revenues to other purposes.

Then there is a large class of infidels and sceptics of all sorts—especially in our cities and

large towns—men who deny the truth of the Bible, and hate the very name of Christ and Christianity, and who would rejoice to have the opportunity of joining any class of men to pull down the Established Church. These, the enemies of all religion, have their organized societies, paid agents, and publications, for disseminating their pernicious principles all over the country. They are bold and active, as they are unscrupulous and profane, and headed by such men as Bradlaugh and others, these men will work with a will to destroy the Church, in order to destroy the Christian religion itself. Then there is the whole body of the Roman Catholics. Sorely grieved that their own religion is not the established religion of this country, they will almost to a man join in the crusade against the Church. Unfortunately, too, there are some within the Church itself, who, whatever their motives may be, are most unwisely, and as I think, sinfully, taking part with her enemies. Then lastly, there are the Dissenters, or Nonconformists, who form by far the larger and more important class of the assailants of the Church. These are the leaders in the attack, and seem to have taken an oath that they will never lay down their arms

till their object is gained, and the Church is broken into fragments and laid in ruins.

The enemies of the Church are therefore composed of a strange medley and mixture of people, of all shades of opinion and religious creed, and people of no creed, together with all the infidels and open enemies of religion in the land. But while sadly disagreeing amongst themselves over most things, yet just like Pilate and Herod of old, who, being at enmity between themselves, became good friends over the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus Christ; so these people,—the Dissenters and Roman Catholics, and all the waifs and infidels of the land,—are ready to shake hands and make friends over the disestablishment and ruin of the National Church. This being the case, surely it is time, and more than time, that the friends of the Church everywhere were also bestirring themselves and putting on their armour of defence, for the attack has already commenced.

I would not attempt to defend the Church, nor would I advise any of her friends to do it, simply on the ground that she is an old and venerable institution, or because I believe her to be altogether perfect, or anything like it. Some

institutions are old and venerable, but are neither true nor good ; and as for perfection, in any institution that men in their imperfect state have got much to do with, it is in vain to look for it beneath the sun. But I would defend the Established Church for these reasons: *first*, because I believe her to be a true Church of Christ ; *second*, because that with all her faults, I believe that she has been, and is still, one of the greatest blessings, as well as the chief glory of England ; and *third*, because I believe that to disestablish and disendow her, would be one of the greatest mistakes that the people of this country ever committed, and nothing less than a great national calamity.

Notwithstanding the tendency towards Romanism on the part of some, and towards infidelity on the part of others of her ministers, which is deeply to be deplored, yet there can be no question, that for the last 300 years the Church of England has been, and is still, the great bulwark against both Popery and infidelity in this land ; and there can be as little question, that she has been, and is still, the great Christianizer of the mass of the people of this country ; and at the present time is more alive,

and doing more good, more for the glory of God and the salvation of men than ever, and is therefore more than ever worthy of the countenance and support of all good men.

To disestablish and disendow her, would be to rob her of her rightful inheritance, given at various times by her own children to enable her to hold forth the lessons of Christianity to the people in every parish and corner of this land, and that the poor might have the Gospel preached to them without money and without price. It would be to rend her in pieces, and reduce the fragments to so many more additional sects in the land, of which there are far too many already. It would, moreover, follow that by and by thousands and tens of thousands, if not millions of the people in the parishes, villages, and rural districts of the country, and the poorer and more densely populated parts of our towns, would be left without the means of grace and religious instruction altogether,—left to relapse, and live and die in a state of practical heathenism.

Supposing, then, that the Church were disestablished and destroyed, let us see what the Dissenters have to offer the people of England

as a substitute for all the benefits and blessings she is now the means of bestowing. Surely they have, or at least they ought to have, something at all events equally as good, if not better, or it is simply outrageous in them to attempt to pull down and sweep away the National Church. When I speak of Dissenters you will understand me to mean chiefly the Independents and Baptists, for these are without question the more clamorous and formidable enemies of the Church. As for the Methodist bodies, who are doing ten-fold more than the Independents and Baptists to reclaim the poor and the ignorant from vice and heathenism, they are taking but little or no part in this matter at all. As a matter of course the Dissenters consider their own system better than your's, and no doubt would like to see it embraced by you and by all. Let us see then what they have to offer you.

In the first place they have to offer you what is called the "Voluntary Principle." Now this voluntary principle has a very wide signification, and in the lips and writings of debaters and agitators frequently means something like this.—They believe, or at least they say they believe, that it is a sin to have an Established Church at

all, seemingly forgetting that for some 1500 years the Jewish Church of old existed as an Established Church, by the express appointment and command of God Himself; and without the slightest hint in the whole Bible, from beginning to end, that what was right then would ever be wrong to the end of time. Nevertheless, they have somehow discovered that an Established Church is a sin and altogether wrong: that it is wrong for the Government of a nation, as such, to give any pecuniary support or encouragement to the cause of religion in any shape or form whatever, and that it is wrong for a Christian Church to accept any such aid, to support the ministers of the Gospel, and promote the glory of God in a land, or in the world. Yea: this voluntary principle says that it is wrong to give any of the nation's money to help to support the nation's schools: *i.e.*, should the Bible be read in these schools, and the first principles of religion be taught to the nation's children. One would have thought that a little of the nation's money could not have been given for a better or nobler purpose than this; but the voluntary principle says, No, and therefore opposes it with all its might.

But this voluntary principle goes a step yet farther, and it says that it is wrong for the Government of a nation, as such, to take any notice of religion at all, "that religion has nothing to do with the State, and the State has nothing to do with religion." The voluntaries seem not to understand that the world itself, with all its states and nations, belong to the Lord as well as the Church; and that surely the first duty of every Government of a nation, where God is known, is to acknowledge Him as "King of kings and Lord of lords;" and to govern in His fear and according to His Word. But the voluntary principle says, No.

Now, if this is not an atheistical sort of principle it certainly looks very like it, for it is an ignoring of God and all His claims in the highest councils and tribunals of the land, and in all the nation's actings as a nation. According to this principle, so far as the official actings of the Queen, Parliament, judges and magistrates of our land are concerned, this might be a nation of heathens or atheists, without either the knowledge or the fear of God in it. Where this principle was first found I know not, but there is one Book from which I am sure it was not

acquired, and that is the Bible. It has no place there, unless to be reprobated and emphatically condemned.

Then Voluntaryism, and that perhaps in its more ordinary sense (for it has two or three senses, or there are two or three kinds, or parts of it), means, that religion ought not in any sense or degree to be supported by the State, no, nor even as it appears, by the bequests of our ancestors, or the property set apart from time immemorial for that purpose, but solely and wholly by the voluntary or free-will offerings of those that care and are able to pay for it, or on the "free trade" principle of demand and supply.

Well, I am one of those who believe that religion is a thing worth paying for, and so did all those who centuries ago voluntarily gave their property to endow the Church; but then what of the thousands and tens of thousands all over the land, and over all the world, who do not consider religion a thing worth paying for, and to whom, unless they are to be left to live and die in vice and heathenism, the Gospel must be sent and offered without money and without price, at the cost of others than themselves. What of these? A time may indeed

come when there may be no need for endowed churches—a time when the spirit of true religion will so pervade all classes of society, and the tide of liberality flow so freely and fully, that there will be enough and to spare for the support of all the ministers and ordinances of religion, and to carry on all the works of Christian beneficence and missionary enterprise without the aid of anything either from the State, or from the present rightful heritage of the Church. I could conceive of such a state of things as this: but the Dissenters themselves being witnesses, we are yet a long, long way from it at least in this land—the richest land in the world.

The Dissenters have now had a long and a fair trial of the voluntary system: it ought by this time to be nearly, if not altogether in its perfection with them. What then has it done? Has its success really been so great as to make it wise and safe to at once sweep away the endowments of the National Church, and leave the whole Christianity of the country to its mercy? It has erected a great many chapels of one sort or another, and a number of schools, that is true. It is, however, one thing to build a chapel or school—a spasmodic effort on the part of a few

individuals in almost any locality will accomplish that; but it is quite another and a very different thing, from year to year to maintain in decency and comfort, a minister for the chapel, and a teacher for the school. What then has the voluntaryism of Nonconformists done in the way of maintaining their own ministers? It has done this,—it has given some few of them something like a prize—a £700, £800, or £1000 a year. It has given, perhaps, a third of them what might be called a respectable living, while the remaining two-thirds it has kept, and is still keeping, at a point next to starvation itself; or at least, on a pittance so miserably small that it is simply impossible for men to live in any degree of comfort and respectability, as becomes teachers of religion. Of this there can be no doubt whatever.

Then what has the voluntaryism of the Dissenters done in the numberless localities and districts, especially of the poorer sort, both in town and country, whose populations have outgrown the provision of the Church, and which were perfectly open to their enterprise? It has simply all but let them alone; it flees from such localities and leaves them to the Church or the

Methodists, or a prey to the evil one himself, because they won't pay. Yea: probably at least one-third of the chapels it has built are without ministers altogether, and this simply and solely because there are not means to support them, not even at the starving point. There are men enough to fill them all, if the voluntaries would only supply the money. Such is a view of the voluntary system, the all-sufficiency of which the Dissenters so frequently boast, and which they have to offer as a substitute for the sure provision which the endowments of the Church make for her ministers and ordinances, even in the poorest corners of the land; and but for which the voluntaryism of the Dissenters would have left in benighted heathenism to this day, if not to the end of time.

Let us now look at the system of Church policy or Government which they have to offer you. It is what is called "Congregational or Independent:" i.e., each chapel, congregation, or society of Dissenters stands, or at least ought to stand by itself, independent of all others. It manages all its own affairs, elects and installs its ministers and officers, and each member of the *society*, old and young, learned and ignorant,

wise and foolish, has an equal right to vote and decide on all matters,—from the election of the minister, what he is to receive as his hire, whether he is to be retained or dismissed, down to the sweeping of the chapel, and who is to do it; and from this vote of the society there is no appeal. It may be right, or it may be outrageously wrong, as it often is: but no matter. It is the voice or decision of the Church they will tell you; and this means much the same as if it were the voice of God, therefore it is decisive and final.

Now this system of congregationalism or independency might do very well in a society or world of angels, but unfortunately for it this is a world of men and not of angels; and unfortunately too, the angelic spirit is by no means much more prominent in the societies of Dissenters than amongst other people. I have said that the vote of the majority is called the voice or decision of the Church, which would seem to mean something of very serious import if we did not happen to know a little more particularly about it. Well, this voice or decision of the Church, in the great majority of cases, just means the voice or votes of one, two, or three

dozen, or score of people, often by no means very remarkable for either their intelligence or piety, headed or presided over by some well-to-do grocer or draper, who generally manages to get things pretty much his own way, or there is rough work, and to whom the minister—if there is one—must be ready to bow, or it will not be so well for him.

No doubt in larger and well-to-do congregations, numbers of which are found chiefly in the larger towns, and where there are a number of sensible persons, the voice of the Church may have a little more sense and importance in it: but in every case it just means the vote or decision of the majority of each separate society, entirely by itself. Each congregation or society has the fullest liberty to carry out its own views or notions of doctrine, worship, and discipline, and everything else, without being amenable in any degree to any authority whatever for its doings, be they right or be they wrong. This then is Independency or Congregationalism, pure and simple: it is the principle on which all the Independent, and Baptist, and a number of other Dissenting places of worship are founded.

Such being the principle, or theory, on which

English Dissent is founded, let us next advert for a little to its practical working. As each separate congregation, whether great or small, is considered a complete Church in itself, and can make or break its own laws at pleasure, and as each member of the society—even the most ignorant and stupid—has, and claims an equal right and power with the most intelligent and discreet, as might be expected, wranglings and heart-burnings are hardly ever at an end in these societies. A Church meeting, *e.g.*, is held say once a month. The members assemble and proceed to business, and too often the affair is something like this:—Jones, the shoemaker, must have things his way, and Hardy, the draper, must have things his way; and Williams, the tailor, sides with Jones, and Wilkes, the grocer, sides with Hardy; and Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Hardy are exchanging anything but kindly looks; and Miss Meek, the dressmaker, and Miss Moses, the confectioner, are winking and smiling at each other; and so these dear brethren and sisters are all at it in right earnest. Such is but a too faithful representation of many, many of these Dissenting Church meetings.

Although their congregations, at least the ma-

jority of them, are, comparatively speaking, but handfuls, yet they generally manage to form two or three different cliques or parties in each, and too often, over the most wretched trifle they will fall out, and then the contention is for the mastership. Clique against clique, and party against party, they will sometimes insult and abuse one another in such a manner as would disgrace the market-place. In course of time matters are again made up, only, however, to again by and bye quarrel over some other affair; and such is the history of vast numbers of these Dissenting places of worship during their whole existence. I have said that after they have thrashed each other to their hearts' content, it may be for months or years on end before the rival parties agree to make matters up, and work together again; but often they never do. Ten, twenty, or thirty of them will bid the others good bye, as if in sworn hate for ever. They will then go, as if for the glory of God, and the good of the souls of men, and set up a new interest or chapel of their own, and christen it Salem, Zion, Bethel, Ebenezer, or some Scriptural name, and thus the two parties will go on *in unholy rivalry, speaking ill of each other so*

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long as they live, and handing down their mutual ill feeling as a legacy to their children when they die. Now this is no caricature of Dissent that I am giving,—it is no false report that I am raising, as Dissenters themselves well enough know. I shall doubtless be called, yea, I am called already, anything but a gentleman, for publishing it: but I hold it to be but right that Church people should know the sort of thing that the Dissenters have to offer you in place of your Church which they seek so earnestly to see disestablished and destroyed. They say all manner of hard things, and not a few false things, against the Church, and therefore they have no reason to complain if a little of the truth is told about themselves.*

Another thing that deserves notice in the system of Dissent is the position and standing of its ministers. Each congregation being independent of the others, as a matter of course the minister is all but entirely in the hands of the people. It is they alone that give him his position; so that at any time, or under any pretext, they can deprive him of it, or render it so

* See Addenda: end of Lecture i.

unhappy that often he is only but too glad to give it up of his own accord, even though poverty and want are staring him and his family in the face. The truth is, that an Independent or Baptist minister has hardly any standing at all; or if he has, it is the most insecure and precarious of any class of men I know. Instead of being placed in a position in which he can faithfully and fearlessly proclaim the truth of God without the fear of suffering from the consequences, as the ministers of the Established Church happily are, and as every minister of religion ought to be, he, poor man, must take good care what he says and how he says it, lest he offend his hearers, and especially the lords of his congregation, and they be revenged on him; either in the way of castigating him, reducing his income, or giving him notice to quit,—a thing by no means unknown among them.

The Dissenting minister is regarded very much as the mere paid agent of the society, whose services may be retained or dispensed with at pleasure. The Scriptural idea of the position of a minister of Christ is, that he is *over* the people in the Lord, to teach, rule, warn, and rebuke *them* when needful, according to the Word of

God: and the people's part is to hold him in honour, to obey and submit themselves to him, according to the same divine Word. But amongst the Dissenters, instead of the minister being over the people, he is actually *under* them, so that the divine order is just completely reversed,—that instead of the shepherd guiding and ruling the flock, with them it is the sheep that guide and rule the poor shepherd,—yea, and very often the goats, much more than the sheep.

Such being the Dissenting minister's position, if he is a man at all, he sometimes cannot help giving offence in speaking the truth; for the lords of his congregation are seldom all of them angels. But then woe be to him when the truth cuts a proud hypocritical sinner to the quick. This often seals a faithful Dissenting pastor's doom. Then when tyrannized over, and unjustly and cruelly wronged, as he often is, by the members of his flock, there is simply no help for the Dissenting minister. He has neither Bishop, Council, Presbytery, Synod, nor law nor justice of any kind to appeal to, or take his part. He must just quietly submit; and in the silence and bitterness of his

own soul, or the bosom of his own family, bear it all without uttering a complaint. Or should he be provoked to speak out and tell the world his wrongs, then he is immediately a marked man through the whole denomination, or the lords at head-quarters will strike off his name from the list altogether; and he is but too glad to betake himself to some other employment. Or if he is advanced in life and fit for nothing else, then he longs for the time to lie down in the grave, to be away from his troubles and tormentors.

Through the merciless tyranny and ill usage to which they are often subjected, many good and noble-hearted men in the Dissenting ministry are actually robbed of all their manliness and independence of mind, and reduced to the pitiable condition of a set of crushed, down-trodden, brow-beaten serfs; and not a few are sent with broken hearts to untimely graves. This is strong language, but I tell you it is not one whit stronger than true. God knows, and scores and hundreds of Dissenting ministers in England, in their sad and bitter experience, know that it is but too true, although they hardly dare even to whisper it.

Under such a state of things as this, the constant removing from one place to another on the part of Dissenting ministers need hardly excite any surprise. Although when first settled at a place, the understanding is, that all things going well, the settlement is for life; yet through the quarrels, dissensions, and persecutions which are so rife among their flocks, the average duration of their ministry in one place cannot be more than five or six years, and in multitudes of cases not more than two or three years. Lest it might be supposed that I am giving an unfair representation of the state of things, I will just give an illustration of the truth of what I have said, from the locality with which I am best acquainted.

In the town of Wigan and its immediate neighbourhood there are fourteen Dissenting places of worship or ministerial charges. Well, in seven and a half years' time, with the exception of my own, I saw every one of these Dissenting pulpits emptied of their occupants, and several of them twice over. I saw eighteen removals of ministers from thirteen of the chapels, and only two of these by the hand of death; and it is known to me that most of those men were "of all men most miserable" before they left.

As to how the Dissenters sometimes go about the work of getting quit of their ministers when they take a spite at them or want to get "a fresh hand," the following cases will give an idea. A respectable elderly minister was going about his duties, as usual, with no other thoughts in his mind than that all was right between him and his flock. One evening, however, when the old gentleman went to a neighbouring chapel for the purpose of installing a young brother in office (I saw him there), that same evening the members of his beloved flock quietly took the opportunity of meeting together in his absence, and passed a resolution to the effect that his services were no longer desired.*

Another case, the truth of which was vouched

* The "young brother" above referred to, alas for him ! Full of hope, he was but a short time installed as minister, when by his manly and faithful preaching he offended a few of the not over pious members of the flock, who commenced a system of mean and cruel persecution, which ultimately broke down the young man's health, and in less than two years he was compelled to resign.

The political *Liberal* agent in Wigan—a deacon in the chapel—was credited with being the leader of the persecuting clique ; and as was publicly stated, made no secret of it, that his sole object in accepting the office of deacon, was simply to promote the persecution and dismissal of the energetic and promising young pastor.

to me by a neighbouring minister, is as follows. A minister in the prime of life was settled in a chapel, at which a rich man who drove his carriage attended, and who of course was the lord of the concern. The minister had laboured away to the best of his ability for some time, seemingly with very considerable success, and had no idea but that all things were going on well with him. One evening, however, when the rich man had invited him to tea, and the ladies had withdrawn and left them alone, the rich man coolly told the minister "that as Mrs. So and So (meaning his own wife) felt that she was not quite so well edified with his sermons as she could wish, he had better take his *notice*, and leave as early as convenient.

Now just fancy what a position this is for men sustaining the office of ministers, and ambassadors for Christ, to be placed in,—a position which is not safe for a single week, hardly even a day, for on any day a squabble may arise in the Dissenting chapel, which is sure in one way or other to involve the minister, and perhaps end, either in his abrupt dismissal, or in rendering his position so utterly unbearable, that he is but too glad to escape from it, of his own accord.

Another thing that here deserves notice is, that now-a-days, Dissenting ministers must be political partizans, or they are almost nowhere. The quiet, earnest, godly men among them,—the men who attend only to their spiritual duties, and shrink from appearing and speechifying on political platforms,—as a general rule, are but of small account in their ranks; whereas the noisy men,—the men who accustom themselves to pour forth from pulpit and platform, bitter invectives against the Church,—soon become men of mark, and stars of the first magnitude, in the horizon of Dissent. These are the men, who, for the most part, find their way into all the best paid pulpits, and other places of influence and power, in their denominations; and then when they get there (as in various ways they have it in their power), these men often become nothing less than hard, imperious, unmerciful tyrants over their poorer and less fortunate brethren, as hundreds of these brethren feel and know. The hard, unjust, and cruel things that the rulers of Dissent, both lay and clerical, are capable of doing, would to me have been utterly incredible, but for my too certain knowledge of

them, and I may add, my too severe experience of them.

I have said that Dissenting ministers must now become political partizans, or they may reckon on being almost nowhere; they are driven to it by the principal men in their congregations, many of them, I believe, against their will. The truth, the sad truth, is this,—that the political element is now fostered to such an extent, that many congregations of Dissenters are becoming nothing better than a sort of mere half-religious, half-political clubs. The earnest piety that characterized the Dissenters of former days is evidently fast dying out, and a state of things setting in among them, which would hold but poor prospects indeed for the future religious condition of this country, were it to be shaped and fixed by them.

Were those worthy men, the Baxters, and Owens, and Howes, and Henrys of other days again to appear amongst us, they would most assuredly disown the great bulk of the Dissenters of this generation as being their representatives; yea, they would accuse and condemn them as traitors to their principles, as most certainly they are, in the course they are pursuing

towards the National Church. These men, the brightest ornaments of Nonconformity, held fast and firm by the great principle of a National Establishment of religion, and the duty of kings and rulers, as such, to uphold and promote the interests of the true religion among their subjects, and thus honour and obey "Him, who is King of kings and Lord of lords." Alas, that those who claim to be their children, should have degenerated so far from the principles, and it is also to be feared, the piety of their sires!

Just fancy, then, the state of things which those reckless men who are crying for Disestablishment and Disendowment, would introduce, and then judge if it would be for the good of religion, and the good of this country, to sweep away the National Church. We have referred to the principles on which their whole system is founded, and have seen something of its practical working in their own hands. It is the worst suited imaginable, either for preserving uniformity of doctrine, supplying religious ordinances to the mass of the people, or for promoting that peace, harmony, and concord which ever ought to characterize those who profess the religion of *Christ*. From the very constitution of their

societies, quarrellings and heartburnings are hardly ever at an end, nor must it ever be expected; and for this, it is the system, more than the people, that is to blame.

They object to the Church, they say, because there is deadly error, as well as God's truth, taught from numbers of her pulpits. It is a pity they should have such a thing to say,—a pity there should be a single pulpit in the Church of England, from which anything but the pure truth of God's Word should ever be heard; and a pity that such reforms had not long ago been effected, by which unsound ministers could have been more easily reached, and either corrected, or expelled from the Church altogether, and it is fain to be hoped that this may ere long be the case.

But then, if the Dissenters themselves came with clean hands in this matter, or anything like it, their objection might have had some more sense in it. The fact, however, is, that there is hardly a vagary in religious doctrine under the sun, which you will not find among themselves. Their hands are anything but clean in the matter of doctrine.

Or again, and what to them is perhaps the

most serious objection of all, is this: they say that so long as there is an Established Church there is not religious equality; and this inequality is an injustice to them which they cannot bear. From this it would almost appear as if they meant to take up the programme of the old Chartists and Socialists, and level all distinctions. Now what does this religious equality really mean? If I understand it aright, it means something like this: they are envious beyond measure at the respectable and independent position in which the ministers of the Established Church are happily placed; and they want to see them levelled down to the same dependent and humiliating condition in which they place their own; and this, so far as I can understand it, is just about the sum and substance of the sore grievance of "the religious inequality." Now I would humbly submit that this great question of a National Endowed Church, ought never to be treated on such low and unworthy grounds, as a question of mere equality as regards a number of rival sects, goading one another almost to atoms, and to religious death; but rather as a great question *of religious justice* to the mass of the people,—

the toiling millions of our British population,—whose rights and everlasting interests seem to have little or no place in the programme of those who have raised the cry of “religious equality.”

Then they would banish the Bible from the National Schools, which, so far as they are concerned, would leave the great mass of the youth of our land to grow up without any knowledge of the God that made them and the Saviour that redeemed them, which most assuredly is the highest and most important part of all right education, and especially the education that should be given in a professed Christian land. They would pull down and rend in pieces the National Church, which so far as they are concerned, would soon leave millions upon millions of the people in the parishes, villages, and rural districts of the country, and the densely populated poorer parts of our towns, without the stated means of grace altogether; or to be ministered to only by the stray local preacher,—the shoemakers, drapers, and grocers of the towns, or the still more untutored, though well enough meaning, coal-miners and day-labourers of the country.

This in fact is just the sort of religious provision which a leading Nonconformist minister was, not long ago, recommending for the villages and rural districts. Finding that the wealthier congregations in the towns selfishly expended nearly all the money they raised upon themselves, and left the country and poorer congregations to sink or swim, for aught that they cared or did to help them,—in other words, finding that their boasted voluntarism either would not or could not supply means to support ministers in any degree of decency and comfort in the villages and rural districts, he recommended that the thing should not be attempted at all; that instead of having ministers in such places as these that cannot afford to decently support them, the members of the nearest town churches who had got the gift of holding forth, should go out on the Sabbath days, and undertake the religious instruction and pastoral care of our village and rural populations. In this age of progress, what a nice exchange would this be for the regular ministrations of religion, by an educated resident minister of the Gospel!

Now, while I have no doubt at all that many of those lay preachers are good men, if not

much learned,—men who out of love to God really desire to do good to their fellow-men,—yet there can be as little doubt that there are not a few rather strange fish among them,—men who, it is feared, would be quite as anxious to draw the villagers' custom to their shops during the week, as to impart spiritual instruction to them on the Sabbath. As an illustration of what some of these lay preachers can do, what I am about to tell you will give an idea. In a Dissenting place of worship, with which I am but too well acquainted, a preaching draper was one day officiating, and, as the people themselves told me, when he descended from the pulpit at the close of the Sabbath evening service, what did he do, think you? Why he actually displayed and offered for sale certain goods which he had brought with him, and, if my memory serves me right, several bargains were struck that evening.

To the preaching laymen then it is proposed to hand over the religious instruction and spiritual care of the millions of our village and rural population, as the best provision that voluntarism can make for them. So much then for the supposed sufficiency of the voluntary system, or rather so much for its confessed

failure, and hence so much stronger the reason for upholding and defending the Established Church.

We are frequently asked to look at America, and there behold the triumphs of voluntarism, in the multitudes of its thriving and overflowing congregations, and the magnificence of its Bible, Tract, and Missionary Societies, etc. Now we are quite aware of all this, and rejoice in it. But then how little do we hear of the millions upon millions of the people of that land who are known to be living entirely estranged from all religious ordinances; multitudes of them living in localities where no place of worship is within their reach, and hardly ever hearing a gospel sermon in their lives; and multitudes more of them repelled from the existing churches by the system of high pew rents, because they have no endowments.

Without wearying you with a multitude of extracts from American publications, showing the sad enough state of things there, I shall just give you a few sentences from a writer not long ago in the *New York Christian Examiner*, who may be supposed to have known something about what he was writing. Referring to the

working of the voluntary system in the towns of New England,—that part of America which has been considered by far the best part of it as respects religion and morality; and for this reason too, viz., because till within the last forty or fifty years religion there had all the advantages of being established by law, and endowed out of the taxes of the country,—speaking only of the towns (and it is well known that the country districts and villages are in a much worse condition) he says, “The voluntary system has been tried in our New England towns,—tried but imperfectly and in part—tried under a thousand helping influences of old association—tried in a community unusually sober, intelligent, and self-restrained—tried for a generation only; and already, as we have seen, it has gone far to undermine the institutions fortified by centuries of sacred and unchallenged custom, and renders the future extremely doubtful. The multitude of petty sects are goading one another to atoms, not only logically but also financially. What started in religious fervour, or passion, or pique, will scarcely command the personal sacrifice of a second generation to keep it going. These voluntary institutions at the best secure only for

a few individuals,—and those the richest, the most privileged and cultured,—something of that privilege which should be the aim of religion to bestow upon all. The churches, supported by exorbitant pew rents, and fitted up like splendid parlours for the comfort and luxury of the rich, existing side by side with the unchurched masses, are at once the most gorgeous and painful proofs that the voluntary system has failed to do its work." Look to America, say our voluntary and disestablishment friends. Yes, we reply, and look ye also to America,—one glance of which might well suffice to close your mouths for ever.

Such, then, is an idea of the sort of thing which the Dissenters have to offer the people of England, in room of the Church which they are seeking to disestablish and destroy. If they had had anything decent or feasible to offer—anything equally good or better than that which they wish to take away,—one might not have wondered quite so much at their conduct; but to come forward with such an affair as they have to offer, their proposal is simply outrageous, and indicates a recklessness and want of enlightened patriotism—not to speak of religion—that is as truly astonishing as it is lamentable.

If for nothing else, one wonders how for very shame they could hold up their heads and ask the people and Government of this country to sweep away the Established Church,—a Church which is dear to what may be called the head, the heart, and the feet of the English nation; and which at the present time is more alive than ever to the great work of preaching the everlasting Gospel to the mass of the people at home, and sending it abroad among the millions of the heathen in foreign lands; a Church under whose shadow many even from among themselves are glad to take refuge from the bitter animosities, the strife, anarchy and tyranny that ever reign in the ranks of Dissent. I say the wonder is, how that for very shame, and under pretence too of love to God and good to man, these people can hold up their heads and join with all the Papists and infidels of the land, to clamour and agitate for the overthrow of the National Church. I only trust the people of this country will have more sense, more patriotism, and religion too, than ever listen to their overtures and clamours.

I have already spoken of the practical failure of the voluntary system after a long trial and a

fair field. I have referred to the many localities and moral wastes of our land unprovided for by the Church, and invitingly open to the Dissenters to take up and display the triumphs of their voluntaryism, but which they have failed to do. I have referred to the failure of the system in so far as one half or two-thirds of Dissenting ministers are doomed to live on salaries so small that they can hardly afford the necessities and decencies of life, and often received by them too, under circumstances of the most humiliating character,—salaries so miserably small, that the coalminers and mechanics of our land would scorn to accept them as the price of their daily labour.

I have referred to the fact that not less than one-fourth of their chapels all over the country, and especially in the villages and rural districts and places where they are most needed, are without ministers altogether; and this simply and solely because of the want of means to support them. They have men in abundance to fill them all; but the everlasting cry and lament is, the want of means to support them.

Now if all this does not prove something, if it does not proclaim as with trumpet voice in the ears of all men, and especially in the ears of

Churchmen, that the voluntary system is a failure, —if it does not do this, it can only be said that the logic of facts is no longer understood. And all this failure, too, must be patent to the eyes of those who are crying for disestablishment. They cannot be ignorant of it; and therefore we say the more shame to them for seeking to pull down the Church, and bring about the same pitiable state of things over all the land as exist among themselves.

They say too, that it is for the good of religion and the good of the Church herself, that they are seeking to disestablish and disendow her. It would be a strange and a new way to do a man good, to throw him to the ground and rob him of his property; and it would be quite as strange a way to do the Church good, to take away her property, the very means by which she is enabled to maintain her ministers and their families in decency and comfort, and uphold the ordinances of religion in every parish of the land. The longer I live, and the more I see and know, the less do I believe that the great majority of those who are crying for Disestablishment are actuated by pure religious principle at all. There may indeed be a

mistaken few: I simply don't believe there are many.

At all events, so far as the Dissenters are concerned—and these form the great majority of the assailants of the Church—with such a manifest failure of the voluntary system in their own hands, before their own eyes, and before the eyes of the people of this country, it appears to me, that for the sake of decency alone, they ought to be the last people in the world to attempt to tear down the framework of the Church, and sweep away the material support of her ministrations.

As Dr. Chalmers said many years ago, "We must first behold the moral triumphs of voluntaryism in the many surplus localities which are before our eyes ere we can consent to give up the whole territory into their hands; and do think that men who have evinced so little their power to build, should be somewhat less fiery and precipitate in their zeal to destroy."

To disestablish and disendow the Church,—at least until things are in a very different condition than they are at present, or are likely to be, perhaps, on this side the millennium,—would be one of the greatest mistakes that the people

and Parliament of this country ever committed. It would manifestly be both a great national sin, and a great national calamity.

By all means let the Church be reformed, where this is needed, so as to adapt her more to the altered state of society, and the moral and spiritual wants of the country. Repair and improve the great machine, and put it in better working order,—but do not tear down the framework, do not take away the supports. It is easier to pull down than to build up; and this machine of the Church, with a little adjusting of its parts, is capable of becoming a far more powerful engine for good than ever.

Let her ministers awake to a sense of the solemn responsibilities of their high and sacred calling, as many of them are doing, and let a pure Gospel be preached from all her pulpits, and she has nothing to fear. The millions of her own friends and adherents all over the land, will love her more dearly, and cling to her more firmly than ever; and multitudes even of those who have left her pale, will again be seen flocking to her gates; and God will bless her, and make her a greater blessing to this nation and people in the future, than in the past. Reform

the Church, we say, but for heaven's sake, until you have something better to put in her place; save and protect her from the hands of those who, in a mistaken and fiery zeal, would waste and destroy her.

Let those who cannot conscientiously worship within her pale be satisfied to worship in their own chapels, and work for the glory of God outside. There is room enough for them, and to spare. This would be far more creditable and honourable to them, as it certainly would be far more Christian, than to sound the trumpet of war, and summon to their aid all the Papists, Infidels, and waifs of the land, for an onslaught on the National Church,—the only religious institution of their country about which there is any real permanency and stability, and which alone has the capability of supplying the mass of our population with the lessons of Christianity, and is showing in so many unmistakable ways her desire to accomplish her great mission.

Mr. Lowe, in his memorable speech for the Disestablishment of the Irish Church, compared that Church to an exotic: *i.e.*, to a plant or tree brought from a foreign land, and planted in a soil and climate in which it would not grow;

and hence he cried, "Cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?"

But neither Mr. Lowe nor any one else can say the same thing respecting the English Church. The Church of England is not an exotic. She is rather a noble tree, springing up in its own native soil, whose roots have been watered with the blood of many of England's noblest sons,—the confessors and martyrs of primitive times, the Riddles, the Cranmers, and the Latimers, and hundreds and thousands of the excellent of the earth who suffered and died for the Protestant faith in Reformation days. The tree has taken deep root, and grown and prospered, and spread out its branches till they have reached over the whole land, beneath the shadow of which the people of England have assembled in peace and comfort to eat the bread, and drink the waters of life, and worship the God of their fathers, for the last 300 years, under a reformed Christianity.

The Church of England is therefore not like a sickly dying plant from a foreign clime. England is her birthplace and her home. If there are some sour grapes on her branches, yet on the whole she is bringing forth more good fruit. There

are more life, and vigour, and usefulness in her now, than perhaps for the last 200 years, and with a little adjusting of her parts and machinery, she is capable of becoming far more useful than ever.

Englishmen, then, we would say, be up and defend your Church. It would be unnatural and unwise, it would be unholy work to cut down such a tree; and it would be nothing less than unpatriotic, un-English, and cowardly, to stand idly by and see it done. Prune, trim, and beautify the sacred tree where it is needful, but for the glory of God and the highest welfare of the people of this land, even for generations to come, spare it: spare it, protect it, and wisely and nobly defend it from the violence of those who would so rudely and cruelly lay the axe to its roots.

ADDENDA.

It was but natural to expect that I should be accused by some Dissenters of giving an unfair account of the character and working of their system, which I had no desire, and certainly had no need to do. The simple truth is far too much for it. On the other hand, some Dissenters, both lay and clerical, have complained that I have kept too far *within* the truth, and that in doing the thing at all I should have been much more severe. However, conceiving a middle course to be the best, I have endeavoured to keep it.

The following extracts from letters received from Independent ministers, will not be without interest as bearing out some of my statements in both lectures.

The names of the writers, for obvious reasons, cannot be given, but the genuineness of the documents need not be doubted.

The first is from an Independent minister of more than twenty years standing, and is as follows :—

“DEAR SIR,—Yourself or some friend has sent me to-day your admirable ‘Plea for Church Defence,’ etc. I cannot refrain from tendering you my best thanks for the same, and for your manliness in so truthfully ‘hitting the nail on the head.’ It is a faithful exposition of our system, under whose tyranny myself and others have long been groaning. It is a most accurate portraiture of my own experience. The particulars in many respects are identical, and I know many who, like

myself, can endorse every statement you have made. What I have endured under the system no tongue can tell. Rather than confront the upholders and abettors of the system, the poor ministers succumb, and change spheres, which, as in my own case, oftentimes is no better than 'jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire.' The circulation of your excellent and timely plea must do good. Pray send me a few copies, that I may lend them for reading. If the Bishops of the Church of England would only receive us, dispensing with formalities, many, many amongst us would gladly escape from worse than Egyptian bondage," etc.

"With fraternal regards, most truly yours," etc.

The next is from an Independent minister of thirty years standing. After referring to other things, he says:—"The Churches, I dare say, are not so very warm in your favour, but *hundreds of ministers* are blessing you. One said to me the other day, 'He might have given far more pungent cases than he has,' etc. May God bless, support, and prosper you in all your ways," etc.

The next, from the letter of an Independent minister in the South of England, will show that my representations of the treatment of Dissenting ministers and the too frequent character of Dissenting Church Meetings are by no means overdrawn. He says:—

"The treatment I have met with here is low, dirty, blackguardly, and all because I have insisted on my rights, and in the pulpit exposed villainy when the subject came appropriately under review in the text from which I might be preaching. The result has been unparalleled insult, indescribable annoyance, malicious conduct and spirit, and now a complete stoppage of

the supplies, the last quarter's seat rents only yielding about £3. And the minister has no remedy in Independency. He accepts a charge by the unanimous invitation of a Church, as I did here, and my call signed by 200. He throws himself upon the liberality of the people; by and by he offends one or two—and in a village like this, where so many families intermarry, and family influence runs high—when he offends one or two, he may lose 40 or 50, as in my case. When I was about to bring discipline to bear upon the husband and brother of a woman for drunkenness (open sin), she packed the Church meetings, defied my authority, carried her point by a majority of her own family connections, and kept the parties in the Church, and insulted me in the meetings, till I decided to call no more such Church meetings. The whole thing was a farce. If I called one, the weak and timid members absented themselves, fearing a row, and the bullies came in numbers, and insisted on voting, and so outvoted and thwarted me and the friends of order on every point, and then called this 'Independency.' And then what remedy has an Independent minister? If he appeals to his brethren, one half of them are false brethren, and the other sycophants, pretending to sympathize with him probably, and yet take the part of the malcontents, and quietly tell him to retire. This is uniformly the advice of 'County Unions,' and in nine cases out of ten the poor minister is sacrificed."

From another letter, also from the south, I quote the following:—

"It is a real kindness, and a good service to our common Christianity you are doing, to expose the system and warn others, by letting them know what

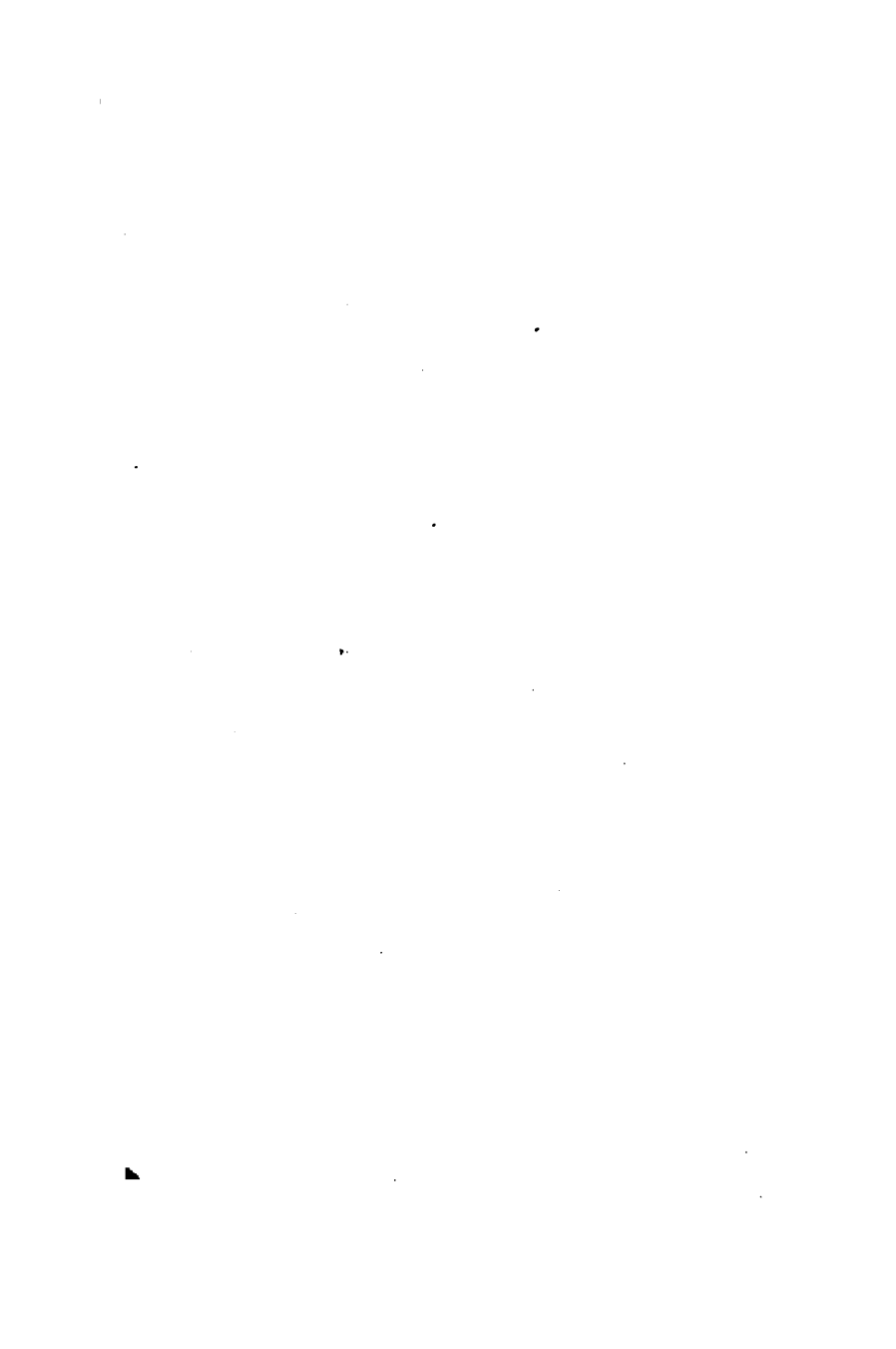
'Our Glorious Independency' is, as practised in good Old England.

"If your lecture were mine, I would make several of your mild expressions much more pungent and caustic. You have been too mild by one half. The abominations of our system, especially as seen in our smaller Churches, are really awful. Do not mince matters in your next edition of the lecture," etc., etc.

It will thus be seen that if I am considered a little severe on the system of Dissent, other Dissenting ministers are harder on it still; yea, there are multitudes among them who, if they dared to speak their minds, would have no more good to say of it than I have said, and who at this moment are secretly regarding me as one of the best friends they have had for many years.

R. C.

The Liberationists Unmasked.



LECTURE II.

DELIVERED IN THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTION, HALIFAX, AND IN VARIOUS
OTHER TOWNS.

The Liberationists Unmasked.



MY present lecture is to consist of a few remarks on the "Church of England, and the policy of the Liberationists,"—not the policy of the Dissenters, but the policy of those who are seeking the disestablishment and overthrow of the National Church. It should always be borne in mind that all Dissenters are not Liberationists; and I believe that if Dissenters generally only better understood this question in all its relations and bearings, there would be but few Liberationists among them, even should they still continue to prefer the worship of their own chapels to that of the Church. I am sure they

could not fail to see that it would not be for, the good either of themselves or their country, and its Christianity, to sweep away the grand old Established Church, which has been an incalculable blessing to this land in ages gone by; and which, though now so old and venerable, is at the present time showing more life and youthful vigour than perhaps at any period of her history.

Now, then, respecting this Church question: as Mr. Gladstone, in his reply to Mr. Miall's speech or motion for Disestablishment said, it is one "of immense sweep and volume." It is of such immense sweep and volume that, in dealing with it, one hardly knows where to begin or where to end. It is, therefore, only a few points that I can pretend to touch upon in the course of one short hour. Here, then, we have a great institution in this country, called the Church of England, consisting of something like 15,000 separate buildings or churches, spread over the whole country,—a church in every parish, and a parson along with every church. Now, about this Church of England; it is worth while inquiring at the outset, "How did it at first spring up in this country? and how has it been all

along supported?" To answer these questions we must go a long, long way back in the history of the nation, even to the time when there is but little history of our country that can much be depended on. It is well enough known that the Christian religion found its way into Britain at a very early date; but by whom it was first planted, and in what way, it seems impossible to ascertain with any degree of certainty. At that time it must be borne in mind that the inhabitants of this country, for the most part, were little better than a set of naked or half-naked painted savages, living together in tribes, in mud huts, in the woods, forests, and fens, and gaining their living chiefly by hunting, fishing, and plundering one another in warfare; for the ancient Britons were great warriors, as Britons have always been. In those times, of course, there were no Kings, Queens, or Parliament such as we have now. The strongest men and best warriors became the Kings, or chiefs of their own tribes; and their Parliaments, such as they had, simply consisted of a few of the next best warriors to themselves. As a matter of course they were all idolaters, and worshipped the sun, and moon, and gods of wood and stone. Such is an

idea of the state of the people of this country when the great Cæsar landed on its shores. The field must indeed have been very uninviting to those first missionaries of the cross, who came from foreign lands to our's with no other ambition in their hearts than that of turning our savage sires from their idol gods, and winning them to Christ and to heaven; and surely we, as Christians and as Britons, to-day have cause to bless and honour the memory of those noble men, for the great work they did in our land then. These first missionaries to Britain were greatly blessed with success in their work. By and by, under the holy and heavenly influence of the teaching and preaching of the religion of Jesus Christ, many of the British chiefs and their savage followers were civilized and Christianized. But, owing to the continual wars among themselves, and the invasions of other enemies from across the seas, the whole country from end to end was ever kept in such a state of distraction and turmoil, that no regular Government or laws could be permanently established; and while Christianity was all the while making its way by ebbs and flows, yet the whole history of its rise and progress that has been preserved and come down

to us, is so meagre, that for at least the first 500 years of the Christian era we have but very little to depend on. One thing, however, seems clear enough, and that is, that as the chiefs, or kings, and other lords of the soil became converted to the Christian religion, they erected churches on their estates; and, according to the custom which prevailed in the Jewish Church before, they set aside, devoted, or consecrated a tenth part of the value or produce of their lands for the perpetual maintenance of the public worship of God in these churches. And as more and more of the lords and squires became converted to the Christian faith, so more and more churches were built and endowed in the same way, till in the course of time the heathen worship disappeared from the land, and the whole country became Christianized, and an endowed church came to be met with on almost every estate of any size and importance; and these estates, or lordships, ultimately became the parishes of the land. So here we have about the whole secret, the sum and substance of the origin and the endowments of the English, or British Church. It was not, as some people believe, and as some people would have all people

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believe,—it was not the Kings, the Government, or Parliament of the country that ever built and endowed the parish churches; but the Kings, and nobles, and squires of the realm, out of their own private properties. No law was ever heard of compelling the first Christian landowners to build and endow churches. They needed no such pressure. Out of love to God and good to man they did it of their own accord, of their own free will. Laws, indeed, were instituted afterwards to compel succeeding careless and godless landlords to fulfil the conditions on which they inherited, or held their estates, by giving the Church, or parsons, their due. But as for the first Christian landlords, who built churches and originally charged their lands with tithes, I have never heard it pretended that there was any law in existence, but the law of love to God and duty to man, to impel or compel them to do so. This law was enough. The oldest of the old parish churches had their origin precisely in the same way as multitudes of the new churches have their's. How many spacious new churches do we see springing up from year to year, in populous and neglected parts of large parishes and towns; not erected and endowed by Par-

liament, out of the public funds or taxes of the nation, but erected and endowed by wealthy and generous individuals, out of their own private property! And that is precisely the way in which the churches were built and endowed in the olden times, and from the first.

In connection with the present agitation, this is a matter of the last importance to be clearly understood and kept in mind; and as I do not wish anybody to take simply my dictum on the subject, I will here adduce one or two out of a multitude of authorities that might be cited. The Lord Chief Justice Blackstone, one of the highest authorities we have (in vol. ii. p. 26), has the following. He says, that "when dioceses were divided into parishes, the tithes of each parish were allotted to its own particular minister, —first by common consent, or by appointment of the lords of the manors; and afterwards by the written laws of the land. These lords of the manors, as Christianity spread itself, began to build churches on their domains, or wastes, to accommodate their tenants, in one or two lordships; and in order to have Divine service regularly performed therein, obliged all their tenants to appropriate their tithes to the main-

tenance of their own officiating ministers, instead of leaving them at liberty to distribute them among the clergy of the diocese in general; and this tract of land, the tithes whereof were so apportioned, formed a distinct parish." Then Soames, another authority (at p. 161 of his History), shows that Athelstan, one of the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon kings, in order to encourage the good work, granted the rank of "thane," or "lord," to those landed proprietors who built and endowed churches on their estates, where churches did not already exist. And, not to confine our authorities to one side, it may be mentioned that Seldon, a very learned Dissenter, when arguing against the Divine right of tithes, and referring to those early times when the Church was founded in this country, admits (p. 1209) this much. He says, "When devotion grew firmer, and most laymen of fair estate desired the residence of some chaplain, oratories and chapels began to be built for them also; and being hallowed, or consecrated by the Bishop, were endowed with private maintenance by the founders for the incumbents that should there reside." Again, the late Toulmin Smith, barrister-at-law, and also a Dissenter, in a tract

which he wrote during the Church-rate controversy, says, "So far is the State from at present supporting the Church of England, that every parish church of England was founded, not by the *State*, but by individuals in ages past; so that the Church is no more *State* supported than are the Dissenting chapels in the land." Such, I believe, are the opinions of almost every historian or authority of any name or note, respecting the endowments of the Church,—such as Palgrave, Burn, Short, Southey, Stillingfleet, Rapin, Burke, Hook, Hallam, Milman, and a host of others.

Then, in confirmation of these views of noted individuals, let us next listen to the collective opinion of the English Parliament itself, as recorded in some of the old Acts which refer to the subject. Surely it may be taken for granted that the whole assembled British Parliament, in the olden times, would not be in such gross ignorance as not to know whether the Church was endowed by the State or by private liberality. Well, then, in alluding to the clergy and the endowments of the Church, the 24th statute of Henry VIII., cap. 12, sec. 1, has these words: "And to keep them. (*i.e.*, the clergy) from cor-

ruption and sinister affection, the King's most noble progenitors and the antecessors of the nobles of this realm, have sufficiently endowed the said Church both with honour and possessions." We thus see that Parliament, in the time of Henry VIII.—300 years ago—knew nothing whatever of the story of the Liberators, that the Church was endowed by the State. Then, going back some 200 years more, viz., to the year 1307, in the 25th statute of King Edward I., it is stated that a "petition was presented to Edward I., declaring that the Church was founded under Bishops, that her benefices were endowed by the King's predecessors, and by the Earls, Barons, and other great men of this realm; that presenting clergymen to these livings belonged to them by the good-will and disposition of the founders; and praying for protection against the Pope, who bestowed them on strangers. This protection was granted; and it was enacted that the King, and other lords and donors, should have the right of presentation, in the manner as they were enfeoffed by the original donors." Here it may be remarked, that after the Pope got his unlawful supremacy established in England, he began to put his favourites—who

were chiefly Italians—into the richest livings of the Church, and Englishmen did not like this ; so they betook themselves to their privilege of grumbling, and got up a petition to Parliament, and got this Act passed to restrain his holiness from giving the livings of the Church to these strangers. Then going back farther still, to the year 1276, we find it stated in another Act of Parliament, viz., the 4th of Edward I., that “ the churches were the gift of the lords ” of the land. We thus see that three, five, and six hundred years ago, the Parliament of England knew nothing whatever of the story of the Liberationists, that the Church was endowed by the State. The Kings and Parliaments of those days all believed and declared that the Church was endowed by private liberality. And yet, in the face of all such evidence, men there are,—and men, too, laying claim to superior wisdom and a supreme regard for the good of religion,—who will still go on attempting to deceive the people, with what they must know, or at least ought to know, is nothing less, nothing better, than an unmitigated falsehood : saying that the Church is endowed by the State,—that the clergy are State-paid, as if they were paid out of the

pockets of the people or the taxes of the country, and how wrong it is for Government to expend the nation's money on one religious sect, to the grief and disadvantage of the rest, and so on ; while at the same time the State or Parliament, and the Church too, are perfectly innocent in the matter. Listen to what Burke, the celebrated statesman and philosopher says. In vol. iii. of his works, page 110, he says, "The State has incorporated and identified the estates of the Church with the mass of *private* property, of which it is not the proprietor, either for use or dominion, but the guardian only and regulator." Now this is precisely the relation in which Parliament or the State stands to the endowments of the Church. It is not the owner, but simply the guardian, trustee, and regulator of those endowments. Parliament may be said to be the guardian and regulator of the whole property of the kingdom. No property can be held—can neither be bought, sold, bequeathed, nor heired, without the State, by its laws, giving force or validity to the transaction. A landlord cannot enforce payment of rent from his tenants without the aid of the State. A Dissenting minister cannot claim the endowment left to his chapel without the

aid of the State. The Liberators themselves cannot claim their rights to their own endowments and places of worship without the aid of the naughty secular State, and so on. But then, while the State thus guards and regulates the rights of property,—the property of the Church and all other property,—it does not on that account claim the property as its own; it only sees to the rights of its owners. I think, therefore, it must appear clear enough to all,—except indeed to those who either have no eyes, or having eyes, will not open them to see,—that the endowments of the Church do not, and never did, belong to Parliament or the State, any more than Dissenting chapels and their endowments; and that, therefore, the State can have no right to take away what it never gave.

But the Liberationists have another theory or story which deserves some notice, and it is this: They say that the property of the Church is “national property,” and that as they form a part of the nation,—and according to themselves by far the more important part of it too,—therefore that property belongs as much to them as it does to Churchmen themselves. To this I would say, that the property of the Church belongs

neither to Churchmen nor Dissenters, in the sense that either of them have any right to take it away from the Church, or do with it as they have a mind. In a very important sense it may indeed be called national property, because it is spread over the whole nation, and exists for the nation's highest good. It also in a sense belongs to Dissenters, though certainly not to carry it away: but it is theirs in the use and advantage of the privileges which it offers; that is to say, if they choose to avail themselves of them by attending the worship of the Church, and by otherwise identifying themselves with her. In this sense, in this way, but in no other, the property of the Church may be said to belong to the whole nation, and to Dissenters as well as to other people: but for Dissenters to assume or pretend that they have any right to interfere with it and apply it to other purposes, is simply ridiculous and outrageous. They can have no more right to do anything of this sort than Church people have a right to meddle with their chapels and endowments, and that is none at all: and I fancy it would be a long while indeed before Church people would have either the injustice or the ill-breeding ever to think of such

a thing. If Dissenters are envious and angry because they derive no advantage from the endowments of the Church, whose blame is it but their own? The doors of the Church stand wide open to receive them—yea, to welcome them, if they choose to enter in; and if they do not choose to enter in, they have their own Zions and Bethels and Ebenezers to repair to; where, protected by the strong arm of the State—the same State that protects the Church—they have the fullest liberty to worship God, according to the dictates of their own consciences, in any way they like, few willing and none daring to make them afraid. So, therefore, what reason have they to complain that either the Church or the State does them any harm? It seems hard to see that they can have any good reason at all.

Or again, they will say that they have a conscientious objection to the very principle of an endowed Established Church, and contend that such a Church is unscriptural and everything else that is evil and wrong; and they do this, too, in the very face of Scripture itself,—in face of the fact that for some 1,500 years the Jewish Church of old existed as an endowed Established Church, by the express appointment of God

Himself, and without the slightest hint in the whole Bible from beginning to end, that what was right then, should ever be wrong to the end of time. And yet they maintain that an Established Church is against Scripture; and cry out and complain that their consciences are violated and sorely oppressed by the existence of one in this country. I am thankful to say that I never held or expressed such opinions. This is the new light, or new-fangled "voluntary principle," which all the older and best of the Nonconformists condemned, and would now execrate were they again to re-visit the world. To give full swing to this conscience theory of the Liberationists would indeed be a serious matter. I suppose the consciences of Roman Catholics feel aggrieved and hurt at the existence of Protestant Dissenting chapels, and at the existence of the Protestant religion in any shape or form in this country and in the world; and if the more fiery and bigoted among them had their way, as they have the will, they would soon—and conscientiously too—make short work of us all. Mere conscience, even when sincerely followed, is far from being a safe guide, in matters of religion as in many other things. If we do not take the

teaching of God's Word and the dictates of reason along with conscience, we are sure to go astray. Under pretence of obeying conscience the most fatal errors have been embraced: yea, the most shameful tyranny and revolting crimes have been perpetrated. How often, too, have we seen that those who are the loudest preachers of the rights and liberty of conscience, show but small regard for the consciences of others. How much, *e g.*, do we hear about the conscientious grievances of Dissenters because they cannot get the Church disestablished and disendowed, and her growing influence arrested or destroyed? But we never hear a single word—no, not one—respecting the consciences and conscientious convictions of those tens and hundreds of thousands of earnest, intelligent, and Godly people within the pale of the Church, who conscientiously believe that an Established Church is in accordance with both reason and Scripture, and who deeply feel that to disestablish and disendow the Church of England would be nothing less than a national sin and calamity, a dishonour to God, and a deep injury to His cause and truth in this land, and indirectly in other lands as well. I say, not a single expression of regard for the intelligent

and earnest convictions of these Church people do we ever hear. In fact, it seems always assumed or taken for granted that the members of the Church of England either have no conscience in the matter at all, or if they have, their consciences must be coerced and ignored, as if utterly unworthy of the slightest consideration at the hands of those gentlemen who are either blessed or afflicted with such tender consciences that they cannot endure conscience in others. Now, in this utter ignoring and disregard of the consciences of others on the part of these Libérators, what do we see? Why, what do we see but the very essence of religious intolerance and tyranny; and if many of those men had their way, as they have a will, we should ere long I fear have but small religious liberty in England. Many of those men,—and I speak from what I have seen and known,—many of those men who are the loudest preachers of disestablishment, or what they now call “Religious equality,” if you were only to follow them from their political gatherings to their own chapels and other places where they have authority and power, you would there find them to be nothing better than a set of insolent, overbearing, domineering tyrants, before

whom everybody and everything must give way. I have seen so much and known so much, and I may add, in bitter experience have endured so much at some of their hands, that for years I have been utterly sickened and disgusted at the hollow pretences of so many of these men, that I must confess it is with some difficulty that I can restrain my indignation while speaking of them. I say we may well thank God that there is a Church in our land, where such petty and shabby tyrants as rule in the ranks of Dissent are powerless.

Again, the Liberators object to the Church because there are things about her that need reform; and the only way to reform her, they say, is to disestablish and disendow her: *i.e.*, to rob her, to break her up, or as I have heard it put, "Destroy her root and branch, and sweep her away as a nuisance from the land." This is the sort of cure which these wise and kind physicians would apply to heal the sores of the Church. That there are things in the Church that need reform may on all hands be freely granted; but may not the same thing be said of almost every other institution of the country? For example, are there not many things about

the army, the navy, the civil service, yea, and about the very laws that regulate the whole affairs of the kingdom, which need reform? Why, so much is this the case, that nearly the whole work of Parliament from year to year consists of little else than endeavouring to amend and reform what is amiss in these institutions. But while there are many things that need reform and improvement, yet who would ever dream of demolishing the army, the navy, or the civil service altogether, or of breaking up the system of laws by which our country is governed, because of their imperfections? Yet this is the policy—the wild, reckless, revolutionary, and destructive policy which the Liberationists would apply to the Church. After all it does strike me, and ever has struck me, that this matter of reform in the Church is one which on every account much more concerns Church people themselves than Dissenters; and Dissenters know but little if they do not know that multitudes of the wisest and best members of the Church are quite alive to, and very deeply concerned about getting put to rights what is wrong in her. But in connection with this cry of the Liberationists against the Church because she

needs reform, I think a very fair question might here be asked, and the question is this : Is there no need or room for reform in Dissent ? Are there no abuses and corruptions amongst the Independents, the Baptists, and other sects, as well as in the Church ? I have no hesitation in answering that there are, and these many and great too. No doubt they are chiefly of a different character from those complained of in the Church ; but if they were all recounted, laid bare, and trumpeted over the land, as those of the Church are, I am very sure that instead of being any better they would appear even more scandalous, odious, and hateful than anything found in the Church, especially as they exist under pretence of a far higher and purer form of Christianity than that of the Church. The low intrigues that are often carried on by cliques and factions, about Dissenting chapels,—where each member is supposed to possess equal power to rule ; the jealousy, envy, ill-feeling, ill-speaking and spite that often exist among the flock, arising out of contests for the lordship of the concern ; the brow-beating, the mean and cruel persecuting, starving out and dismissal of Dissenting ministers, that has now

become so common when a haughty deacon, or a few of the dear brethren, or even the beloved sisters take an offence or spite at them : I say, were all these things, or one-tenth of them generally known, laid bare, and made as public as the shortcomings of the Church are, it would be seen that it was indeed with little grace and much assurance that Dissenters throw stones at the Church, and cry "Down with her!" because she needs reform. It would be seen how applicable to such were the words of One who knows the state of all Churches and of all hearts, when He said, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye." When taunted with what is wrong in the Church, Churchmen may well turn round to the Liberators, and say, "Physician, heal thyself." Let reformation and amendment begin at home; for so long as such things disfigure and defile your own temples, it ill becomes you to meddle with ours.

But supposing the Liberators had their way, *and the Church were disestablished and dis-*

endowed, the question might be asked, "What good would it do?" What good would it do to any class of the people, to the nation generally, and to religion in particular? I have often thought on this; and after listening to all that has been said, and I believe all that can be said in favour of such a proposal, my firm belief is that to carry it out could possibly do no good at all, but a very great deal of evil, and that in many ways. For example, it is believed by many people—and the Liberationists are doing their best to spread and keep up that belief—that if the Church was disestablished and disendowed, tithes and other supposed burdens would be done away with, and then land would be so much cheaper, and farmers and the working classes would be so much better off, and so on. But this is altogether a mistake, as a little consideration will suffice to show. And as there exists considerable misapprehension respecting the property of tithes, and as the Liberationists are beginning to appeal to the working classes, the subject is worth going into a little. In the first place, then, it should be borne in mind that though arising from land, tithes have become a real and distinct species of property,

altogether independent of the owners of land ; and in this way. For the last 1,000 years, most of the land in this country has many times changed hands,—has been bought and sold many times over, and has always been bought and sold subject to the payment of tithes, or for so much less than the value of the tithes ; or, in other words, land has been bought and sold for the last 1,000 years for one-tenth less money than if there had been no tithes. So that the tenths, or tithes of land, belong no more to the present landowners than they do to the Shah of Persia. When a man buys land subject to tithe-rent, he just gives the value of the tithe-rent less for it ; or, when a man takes a farm and pays tithe to the parson, or to some one else, he just pays so much less rent to his squire or landlord. The tithe is thus a distinct species of property, that has from the first planting of Christianity in this country been set aside, and belongs to the parson for teaching and performing the duties of religion in the parish. So that if tithes were done away with, it would be taking from the parson what really belongs to him for the services which he renders, and giving it to the squire, to whom it does not belong, and for

which he would return no such service as the parson does. It would simply be robbing the parson to enrich the squire, for no one else would reap the slightest benefit in any way; and as for the farmer, he would be rather worse off than now, and I will show you how. It is well enough known that the land-market, like every other market, is regulated by the natural law of "demand and supply;" and it is well enough known that no sooner is a farm known to be in the market than ever so many are after it, so that the landlord has never any difficulty in receiving as high a rent for his farm as it is worth, and sometimes even more, as many farmers, to their grief, but too well know. This being the case, as it is, it would require a very large amount of credulity to believe that it would be anything different if there were no tithes. I would ask, if it is at all likely that landlords would refuse to accept a tenth more rent for their farms than they receive now, were they freely offered it, as they would be? Is there one in fifty of them that would refuse? I trow not. Like other men of common sense, looking after their own interests, would not ninety-nine out of every hundred landlords just look at the matter in

this practical way?—"Here is a farm that can bear, and has long borne a rent—say of £100 a year. The farmer has paid £90 of rent to me, and £10 to the rector or vicar, and as the rector or vicar is no longer to receive that £10, my farm is now worth £10 more to me. I do my tenant no wrong, and if he is unwilling to pay the £10 to me that he paid to the rector or vicar, I have only to put my farm in the market, and twenty others as good as he will cheerfully undertake to do it." I ask if this is not precisely the sort of way in which almost every landlord would look at, and act in the matter? So that if tithes were done away with to-morrow, no one could possibly find themselves one penny the richer, except the landlords. As I have already said, it would simply be robbing the parsons to enrich the squires, who generally are pretty well off already. The tithes of the Church—the livings of the parsons, or the value of them in money—would all go into the pockets of the squires, in the shape of so much more additional rent they would receive for their land. This, I think, must appear as plain as plain can be. And is it not, I would ask,—is it not very much to their credit and to their

honour, that while the lords and squires of the soil of the parishes of England are the only persons in the whole country who would be one farthing the richer by the doing away with tithes,—to their honour be it proclaimed, they, of all the men of Britain, would be last ever to countenance such a thing, or join in any move for the robbing of the parsons and the overthrow of the Church? But I have not yet quite done with my friend the farmer. I said if tithes were done away with, instead of the farmer being any better, he would be rather worse off than now, and for this reason. For example, on a farm for which he pays—say £100 a year, that is, £90 to the squire and £10 of tithe, he pays rates or taxes, not on the £100 which he pays in all, but only on the £90 which he pays to the landlord; whereas, if he paid the other £10 to the squire instead of to the parson, he would be rated or taxed for £100 instead of £90; or, in other words, the farmer would have *one-tenth* more taxes to pay than at present. And then, besides this, if he is not to live like a heathen,—if he is to have a church to worship in and a parson to preach to him, and otherwise render him religious service, he would of course have to pay for all

this, in addition to his extra rates; for their livings being taken away, it can hardly be supposed that parsons could live upon the winds, any more than other people. So that I think it must appear clear enough that farmers would be no gainers by Disestablishment, and if they would be no better off, I should like to know who else would, except the squires, who do not want to enrich themselves by any such means?

Now it would be well if people generally, clearly, and distinctly understood and kept in mind these things. I feel almost ashamed to confess that for too long I was deceived and in ignorance about these things myself, and therefore I feel all the more anxious to help others to understand them. The Liberationists have commenced to address themselves to the working classes, with the intention of leading them to believe that the Disestablishment of the Church would somehow be an advantage to them. Now I must confess that a more shameful and bare-faced attempt to deceive the working classes, I do not recollect ever having seen, and I would only hope and believe that the working men of England have too much shrewdness and common sense to allow themselves to be misled and de-

ceived by such a transparent delusion. The case of Ireland, at our own doors, might be more than sufficient to undeceive any that are deceived. Go and ask the peasantry, the working classes, and the poorer people in Ireland, in either town or country, how much better off they are since the Church was disestablished and disendowed there; and they will tell you they are none at all. The Church has been robbed and impoverished, her energies crippled, her usefulness impaired, yet no one has been enriched by the spoil. The people, the working classes, will tell you, that whatever may have become of it, they at least are none the better. As it has been in Ireland, so would it be in England; and should the day ever come that the English Church is disestablished, and the working classes go in with that movement, they will wake up when too late, to discover that they have been like the foolish dog in the fable, that lost his bone in trying to catch its shadow.

Seeing, then, that the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church would do no good to anybody, in a material or worldly point of view, let us now consider for a moment what good it would be likely to do to religion. I have

also thought a good deal on this, and along with multitudes of other people, both in and out of the Church of England, I utterly fail to see how such a thing could possibly do any good worth speaking of, but a very great deal of harm to religion. One of the great advantages—or rather I should say, chief blessings—of an endowed Established Church, and of this Church of England, is this: that it provides religious ordinances for the great mass of the people, and for the poorest of the poor, in every corner of the land. It provides that in every parish or little district of the country, however poor, thinly peopled, or far out of the way, there shall be a house of prayer, whose doors shall stand open every Lord's Day, to invite the people thither to worship the Almighty Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth; and that there shall be an educated and duly qualified minister of the Gospel to lead their devotions, and proclaim to them the glad tidings of salvation, through a crucified and exalted Redeemer and Saviour,—a minister whose spiritual services shall be at their command on all the interesting and serious occasions and events in their lives,—at marriages and baptisms,—to visit them in sickness and

sorrow, to tend them in their dying hours, and perform the last sacred rite over their cold remains, when laid in the silent grave. In short, a minister who should be a man of God, to teach the people how to live, how to die, and how to be happy for ever. This, I say, is the grand idea, the aim and end of an endowed Established Church,—the maintaining of a Church and a minister for the moral and spiritual well-being of the people, in every parish and corner of the land; so that the blessings of the means of grace may be brought within the reach of all, and that the poor may have the Gospel preached to them “without money and without price,” and yet have a place of worship and a minister they can really call their own. Now, despite many, many failings and shortcomings, yet to a very large, and, thank God, to a growing extent, the Church of England is in some good measure fulfilling her grand mission, and answering her grand design, as an Established Church.

Without referring to the cause, I here simply mention the fact, that the tide of religious life in churches and nations, and, indeed, in the world as a whole, rises and falls. A time of great spiritual death and indifference often suc-

ceeds a time of earnestness and activity. This has been marked in the history of religion from the beginning. It is seen all through in Bible times, and in the history of the Christian Church ever since. It has been so here in England. At the Reformation from Popery, a wave of new spiritual life rolled over Britain, both south and north, from end to end. The Holy Spirit of God was poured down from heaven in copious showers on the hearts of multitudes of the people. Men were in earnest—terribly in earnest—and the nation as a whole was stirred to newness of religious life, priests and people together. It was like life from the dead. Then, during last century a wave of spiritual death and religious indifference again arose, and swept over the Church and over the land. Here and there, and only here and there, were to be found earnest and faithful ministers in the pulpits of the parish churches of England, holding forth the lamp of life, and faithfully preaching the Gospel to devout congregations: the great majority were fast asleep. It was the same in Scotland, and the other nations of Europe. Living, earnest religion, had all but disappeared. The Nonconformists of England

experienced the withering blight as well as the Church, and great numbers of their ministers and congregations fell away into Socinianism and Unitarianism. Even the congregation of the pious and celebrated Matthew Henry, in the city of Chester, did so; and the chapel in which the good man so long and so faithfully preached the Gospel of Christ, is a Unitarian chapel to this day, as are some hundreds of others throughout England. Then it was, that here, as elsewhere, infidelity lifted up its ghastly head, and threatened to destroy the very foundations of the Christian faith, and extinguish the light of Christianity altogether. But then, too, it was that some of the most gifted minds that ever adorned our species arose, and chiefly in the English Church,—men who nobly did battle with the giants of infidelity, and completely discomfited them. They rescued the Christian cause from their profane hands, and as it were laid anew the foundations of the Christian hope. Then, too, was it that John Wesley and George Whitefield, as if armed with a commission direct from heaven, went to and fro in the land, like Elijah and John the Baptist of old, and roused multitudes to concern about eternal things. And

then, too, it was that many left the Church altogether, and became Dissenters or Wesleyans; not because they had any dislike to the Church as such, but simply because she was so cold and dead, when they were made alive.

But it is not so now. Within the last thirty or forty years a great revival of religious life has taken place in the Church of England. This revival has manifested itself in various ways, and perhaps in nothing more palpably than in the great work of education.

And here I would direct attention for a little to the education question. Till within the last forty years or so, schools for the education of the working classes and the poor were but few and far between in England: but as religious life began to revive in the Church, the education of the people became an engrossing care to multitudes of her ministers and members. And as the result of their zeal, liberality, and labours in the work of Educating the people, it was found at the passing of the Education Act of 1870, that out of 25,500 schools of all sorts in England and Wales, no less than 21,000—or four out of every five—belonged to the Church of England; and of every 100 children attending school in

the whole country, from 70 to 80 out of the 100 were in these Church schools. Within the last forty years the ministers and members of the Church of England have expended, out of their own pockets, on building and maintaining schools for the working classes, something like *fifteen millions* of money; and are even now, from year to year, raising for the support of schools, let alone buildings, no less than £750,000. And yet in the face of all this, the Liberationists are never at an end crying out against the Church, and especially against the clergy, as if they were the enemies of education, and stood in the way of the progress and welfare of the people; while at the same time it is well enough known to almost everybody, and to the Liberationists themselves, that all over the country the clergy have taken the lead, and borne the heaviest part of the burden of education. A strange and fickle people are the Liberationists. With all the noise they make about it, they have themselves cut but a sorry figure hitherto in the work of education. They have ever had but few schools of their own: *e.g.*, in the large and populous county of Chester the Baptists are said to have only one, and the Independents have very few. But though they

have done so very little themselves, yet who are so noisy and troublesome, and in talk, at least, so zealous for education as they?

Although having done next to nothing, they would now have the people to believe that they alone are the friends of education. For a long time they opposed Government or State aid to schools altogether, and contended that it was the duty of the churches or religious bodies, and the parents alone, to see after the education of the young. And when at last Government offered, and the Church accepted, grants of money to assist the schools, the Liberationists called the Church anything but nice names for doing it. Then by-and-by they accepted Government aid for their own schools, on the same terms and in the same way as the Church did, and taught religion in them all the while, asking no questions of course for conscience sake. And now what have these same Liberationists done again? Why they have done this,—they have exactly wheeled right round, and now stoutly maintain that it is wholly the part of the State to see after the education of the young, and so mean to relieve both the Church and the parent of any responsibility or control in the matter. We

thus see how they change their principles and tactics. At one time they held that the State should have nothing to do with education, and now they hold that it should have all to do with it. So they are handing over numbers of their own schools to School Boards,—*i.e.*, to the State,—and are scheming and working hard to get the Church schools wrested out of the hands of Churchmen, and have them all turned into secular, rate-aided schools, under School Boards, and have the Bible and the lessons of religion turned out of them; so that the Church of England may no longer call them hers or shed her influence over them, even though she brought them into existence, and has nourished and watched over them with such care, and at such a cost of both labour and money. A strange and a fickle people are the Liberationists.

But by the way, I should here explain that it is not as Liberationists in name, but as Birmingham Education Leaguers that the attack is made on the Church schools. It should, however, be known by all,—as it is well enough known by many,—that the men who form what may be called the head and the body of both these organizations (*i.e.*, the Birmingham League and

the Liberation Society) are mainly the same individuals; and it is also well enough known that they have only one object in view in both cases,—and that is the Disestablishment and breaking up of the Church. To gain their object they somewhat remind me of a class of beings (but whether real or imaginary I shall not say) whom I have heard grandmothers speak about when I was a boy: viz., a set of witches who had the power of transforming themselves into various shapes and forms to suit their convenience or interest. Sometimes they would appear in the form of a poor old decrepid woman, pretending to beg, but in reality trying to steal; then in a moment they could transform themselves into a hare, or hound, or a creature with wings to fly, so that they never could be caught. Even so with those who are seeking the downfall of the Church: they have the power of transforming themselves into Liberators, or Leaguers, or the pious harmless Dissenter, at will. As Liberators, they directly attack the Church; as Leaguers, they also attack the Church, only it is in a more round-about way,—viz., by attempting to strip her of her schools. The idea is this: that if the Church were divested of her schools

and of her place in education, her influence would be greatly weakened in the country, and so she would be more easily brought down. Dress it up and disguise it as they may, this is the plain English or meaning of the whole policy, and all the noise of the Leaguers and the Liberators, in the matter of education; and this should be distinctly known and kept in mind.

Well, I have said that the revived religious life in the Church of England showed itself in the matter of education,—in the erection and support of thousands upon thousands of schools, based upon religious principles for the education of the people; till now these schools stud the land from end to end, and are more than 24,000 in number. But the revived religious life in the Church has shown itself in many ways besides this; indeed, in every department of Christian agency and work, in missions to the heathen abroad, and in missionary work among the people at home, in the vast sums of money raised and expended on the restoration of the fabrics of old churches, and the building and endowing of vast numbers of new churches all over the land. The spirit of Christian liberality is being so shed abroad, that according to the “balance

sheet" of the Church of England, sometime ago given to the public with the approval or sanction of the Archbishop of Canterbury, it appears that for the various departments of her work, by the voluntary contributions of her members and friends, the Church of England raises something over *five millions sterling a year*,—considerably more than the whole of her endowments,—thus giving a display of true voluntaryism which completely eclipses and throws into shade the voluntaryism of the voluntaries themselves. But what is best, and what is undoubtedly the secret spring of all, the revival of religious life in the Church is manifested in the more earnest and faithful preaching of the Gospel from the pulpits, and the more devout worshipping of God in the pews. It is not now as it was in the days of Wesley and Whitefield; it is not now as it was forty, thirty, or even twenty years ago. Instead of earnest, faithful preachers of God's Word in the Church being the exception, they are rather becoming the rule. It is clear to all men that a marked and mighty improvement has taken place. Take them all and all, the ministers of the Church are alive and earnest: take them all and all, they are

undoubtedly the hardest workers of any class of educated men in the whole country. So much so is this the case, that it would almost seem as if the clergy of this generation were bent on making up for the shortcomings of those of the past.

Supposing then that disestablishment were taking place, let us see how it would be with the ministers of religion and the supply of religious ordinances to the mass of the people throughout the country. It is evident that one of two things must follow. Either, first, that the work of endowment, in some form, would just have immediately to begin again; or second, there are hundreds, yea, even thousands of parishes in England, in which the doors of the churches would have to be closed altogether, simply because there would be no one to keep them open; there would not be half, and in multitudes of cases, not a third of a living, to any minister to reside, and conduct the worship of God, and attend to the religious wants of the people. That the work of endowment to any extent would again begin is not at all likely. Seeing that another set of Liberators and Church plunderers might just in a short time rise up and

sweep the new endowments all away again, it is not at all likely that persons of wealth would care to leave their property to be dealt with after such a fashion. Re-endowment, therefore, being out of the question, there would remain nothing but what is called the "voluntary system," or the hand-to-mouth voluntary offerings of the people.

Now, in order to form an idea how this plan would work, the better and indeed the only way is to see how it works in the hands of the Liberationists themselves, who have tried it now for a long time, and ought, therefore, to be well up to working it, as they are never tired in lauding it. Take, then, the Independents and Baptists, who form what may be called the very backbone of the Liberation Society, and see how the voluntary way works with them. Well, in numbers of the wealthier congregations in larger towns it does very well. For example: in this good town of Halifax, Dr. Mellor,—whose chapel is attended by members of the wealthy and liberal Crossley family,—is said to enjoy his £1,000 a year; and besides this it is also said—and I hope it is true—that these good people have laid up £20,000 for the doctor's old age and

the good of his family after him. As for Mr. Spurgeon, possibly he may have an income not much, if anything less than some of the Bishops. We thus see how it is that Mr. Spurgeon, Dr. Mellor, and a number of others not much worse off than they, can so well afford to preach Disestablishment and Disendowment. They are as well, if not, indeed, a great deal better off out of the Church, than in all probability they ever would have been within her. But then, how does it fare with Dissenting ministers generally? I answer, But very poorly indeed. This I know, and it is but too well-known among themselves, that there are hundreds upon hundreds of Dissenting ministers in England—and many of them excellent men—who find the hardest work they have to do, is not to make and preach sermons and attend to their other duties, but to make ends to meet, and live. Multitudes among them find it hard enough work to get £60, £70, and £80 a year, on which to exist and bring up their families. But the other year only Mr. Spurgeon said, "He had sent out many men of ability from his College whose congregations were paying them salaries not equal to the wages of day labourers." And while Dr. Mellor is enjoying

his £1,000 a year, with £20,000 more laid up for him to look at, he knows very well that many of his brethren in Yorkshire and elsewhere would be thankful enough if they had £100 a year secured to them.

The small pay of the hard-working curates is frequently thrown in the teeth of Churchmen. I do not doubt that the curates are underpaid. Yet I suppose it is rarely the case now that a curate is offered less than £100 a year; and very commonly, as I observe from advertisements, they are offered from £120 to £150, and sometimes more. But then there is this to be borne in mind respecting the curates, and that is, that the great majority of them are young men in a sort of probationary state, biding their time in the prospect of by-and-by finding themselves in possession of fixed and settled livings. As for the great bulk of half-starved Dissenting ministers, they have but poor prospects indeed of ever being any better off in this world: they are doomed to drag through a weary existence of poverty and hardship, to their graves. The worst of it is, too, that wretched as their livings are, they are not secured to them for a single year or even a quarter of a year; as at any time an

offence may be taken at the Dissenting minister, or a squabble may arise among his flock, when the supplies are all but sure to come short, or as it is too often the case, they may be cut off altogether. I have said it before, and have no hesitation in saying it again,—though I have been called everything that is evil for doing it,—“That a more crushed, ill-used class of men than multitudes of Dissenting ministers are, is not to be found again in all England, or in any part of her Majesty’s dominions.” For proclaiming this hard and sad fact the deacons almost curse me; but hundreds of the ministers, and also their wives, from the very bottom of their hearts, bless me, and regard me as one of the best friends they have had for many years; and would, I am sure, if they dared, present me with a testimonial for acting the part of a *Liberator* on their behalf.

But all this, though bad enough, is by no means the whole evil of the voluntary way, as seen amongst the Liberationists. There are whole crowds, hundreds upon hundreds of chapels and congregations all over the country, and in the midst of dense populations, without ministers altogether. The people are either so

poor or so niggardly that they cannot keep a minister in any shape, and must just be content with the services of anybody,—any decent cobbler, clerk, or draper, who may be willing to supply them in the way of preaching for a few shillings a day. Now these are actual facts which I should think hardly any one would have the hardihood to dispute. Such then is an idea of the working of the hand-to-mouth voluntary way of supporting religion, as seen among the Liberationists. To a few ministers who are fortunate enough to fall amongst wealthy and generous people, it gives £800, £1,000, or £1,200 a year or more. To about one-third it affords a comfortable living; but as for the great majority, it dooms them to a life of humiliating dependence, hardship, and poverty to their very graves.

Now, if such be all the glory of the working of the hand-to-mouth voluntary system in the hands of its own most devoted adherents and advocates, I would ask what would most likely be its results generally, if enforced upon the whole country and upon those who do not believe in it, as being the only right and better way? Is it not but too evident that if this scheme did not work a very great deal better in

the hands of those who do not believe in it, than it does in the hands of the Liberationists themselves, a sad state of things would soon be seen in our land? If in seeking to sweep away the endowments of the Church, the Liberators could have come forward with a scheme so much better that they could have triumphantly pointed to it and said, "See how beautifully it works! See what a nice position it places our ministers in, and how comfortable and secure are the livings it provides for them. See how nicely we can plant and support places of worship, and ministers for them, even amongst the poorest of the people and in the remotest corners of the land. Why not be persuaded to give up your endowments to the landlords, or to support the army and navy, and adopt our system, which you see is so much better than yours? Come and do as we do, and it will be much better for you and for religion itself." If the Liberationists had come forward with a scheme concerning which all this good could have been said to recommend it, their demand would not have been half so absolutely foolish and unreasonable, or have had the appearance of being ill-intended. But to come forward under pretence of an enlightened

regard for the best interests of religion, with such a miserable spectacle as their own system presents as a substitute, and demand that the Church be disestablished and her endowments swept away, appears to me at least to be nothing less than an outrage on reason and religion alike—the policy of men who are either beside themselves, or who are bent on the moral and religious ruin of their country.

To carry out the full programme or policy of the Liberationists respecting both the Church and the schools, and supposing the voluntary way to work no better in the hands of Church people than it does in their hands, the picture which England, as regards religion, would ere long present, could not fail to be something frightful to contemplate. The people are to be educated, and, according to them, educated in what? They are to be educated in everything but in that which of all things is the most essential thing for their well-being, as moral, responsible, and immortal beings: viz., religion. By law,—cold, hard, rigid law,—the Bible and its lessons—the Word of God and the knowledge of God, are, in this Christian England of our's, in this the nineteenth century, to be banished from

our schools, and in future to form no part of the education of the youth of our land. Christian teachers, who would desire to lead the little ones to a knowledge of God and into the way of life, must not so much as name to them the name of Christ, neither in nor out of school hours. Under such a system, Christian teachers, the best of all teachers, would soon be few and far between in the schools of our land, and a set of cold, careless secularists would take their place; as the less religion they had, the less dangerous they would be to the principle of the secular schools. Yea, even Atheists and Infidels, who in various ways could instil their principles into the minds of the young, without either the knowledge or rebuke of those over them, would be quite suitable and eligible as teachers in such schools. The religious instruction which Liberationists talk about being given to the scholars by voluntary teachers out of school-hours, would soon turn out to be all moonshine, for in thousands of instances where would the suitable voluntary teachers be found? And how would the children be got together out of school-hours, just when they were either wanted at home, or felt they ought to be at play? No, no: the scheme of

the League and the Liberators means secular education, pure and simple. It means no religious teaching, no Bible to be read and explained, no God to be worshipped, no Saviour to be set before the little ones in the schools of our land. They must not be told of a heaven to win, or a hell to fear and shun! By law,—even by British law,—religion is to be banished from Britons' schools! Dress it up as they may, when stripped of its sophistry the plain English of the scheme is indeed, "a godless education,"—an education which would befit and become only a nation of heathens or infidels. Then the Church being Disestablished and Disendowed, and left as poor and helpless as the Liberators wish to see her, there are not only hundreds, but even thousands of the parishes of England, embracing millions of people, which, if the voluntary system did no better in the hands of Church people than it does in the hands of the Liberationists, would, with their teeming populations, be left without ministers and the ordinances of religion altogether,—left to relapse into a state of utter religious indifference and heathenism, and so fall an easy prey to the priests of Rome and the priests of infidelity.

I often wonder if the Liberationists ever really consider what would be, not only the probable, but the almost inevitable results of carrying out their policy or programme. Can it be that they are merely rash and unwise? Or can it be that they are wicked? Can it be that, blinded by prejudice, and spurred on by a mistaken and fiery zeal for religion, they want to destroy the Church, that religion may prosper all the better? Or can it be that they are really ill-intended, and mean to deal a death-blow to the best hopes of the Christianity of their country for ages to come? At all events, whatever their motives may be, one thing seems clear enough, and that is, that knowingly or unknowingly, these men by their policy are doing the very best they can to prepare England as a splendid field for the ultimate triumph of Popery and Infidelity, Socialism and Communism.

O England, England, the land of the brave and the free, the land of heroes, reformers, and martyrs, the land of Gospel light and liberty, should the day ever come when the Bible and its lessons shall be banished from thy schools, and thy venerable Church overthrown, that will

be a dark, dark day for thee! Thy glory will indeed have departed; thy sun will have gone down amid clouds of darkest night! But a mercy it is that no such dark and desponding view of things need as yet be taken. The Liberationists, even though they carry in their train all the atheists and infidels and open enemies of religion in the land, are by no means either so numerous or of such mighty importance as, by their noise and troublesomeness, they would lead the country to believe. Still they need to be watched, and their policy and tactics exposed; or it is hard to say what mischief they may not work in time. The great work they are now engaged in is, as they say, that of "educating the people." Yes: educating the people! But in what? Not in the knowledge of God and the way of salvation,—not even in the three R's; but educating the people to hate and oppose the National Church,—the Church of the poor and rich alike, and beloved by millions upon millions of the people through all the land,—a Church which by her learning and piety has been honoured, perhaps above any other Church on earth, for the defence and illustration of Divine truth and the promotion of true religion in the world,

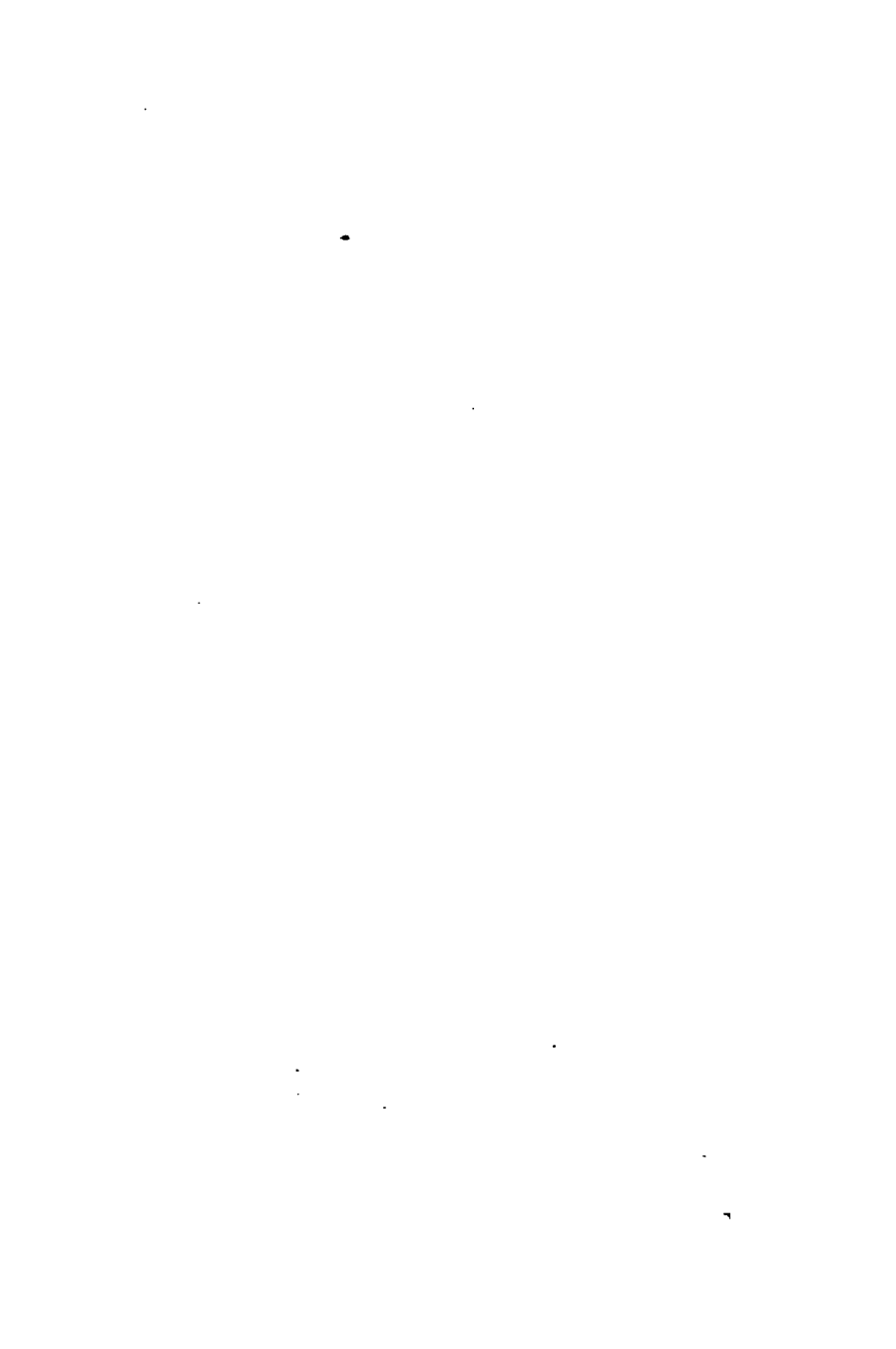
—a Church which from year to year is increasing in usefulness and growing in the affections of the people; stretching out her arms wider and wider to embrace the toiling millions of our land, and lifting up her voice louder and louder to call the wicked and the wanderers from God to repentance, and guide the penitent in the way to heaven,—a Church which, with all her faults, has been and is still both a glory and a blessing to this nation, and the best hope of its religious interests for ages to come: educating the people to believe that this Church, instead of a good, is only an evil in the land,—to get them to believe that if she only were overthrown, and religion banished from the schools, somehow or other the country, the people, and religion itself, would be greatly bettered. And then when the people are educated—or rather I should say deceived—up to this point, get them to send men to Parliament pledged to disestablishment and secular education. Such is the education scheme of the Liberationists; such is the kind of education, which at a cost of many thousands of pounds a year, they are now seeking to impart to the people of this country. Whether such a work as this becomes or befits a set of people calling

themselves Christians, or a set of avowed atheists and infidels, let the Christian people of England—let high heaven itself judge.

But such being the case, it is most certainly more than high time that a counter-scheme of education were set on foot and vigorously prosecuted, not only by the friends of the Church of England but by the friends of our common Christianity. Let the people by all means be educated—thoroughly educated, in all the length and breadth and height and depth of this whole subject; and if this were only effectually done, I am more than convinced that not only the members and adherents of the Church of England, but the greater part and the better part of the Nonconformists as well, would utterly repudiate the principles and policy of the people called the Liberationists, even as their fathers would have done in ages gone by. Yes: let the people only be educated, and not deceived on this subject; and though neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, yet I venture to predict that when the day of the next general election comes,—even as on the day of the past,—the people of England will show that they know too well what is for their own and their country's

best welfare ; and that however many Liberals or Conservatives, Whigs or Tories, may be among them, there will be very few Liberationists, or of those who are known to sympathise with them, returned as members to the British Parliament. Yes : education,—more education on the part of the people of England on this subject is all that is needed, and the battle is fought and the victory won. And the good old Church of England, wisely reformed where reform is needed, will yet be preserved from the violence of those who would waste and destroy her, and handed down, in all her integrity and in all her glory, as the richest heritage to generations yet unborn in this land.

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